

# Briefing Paper



IWPR # R365

January 2013

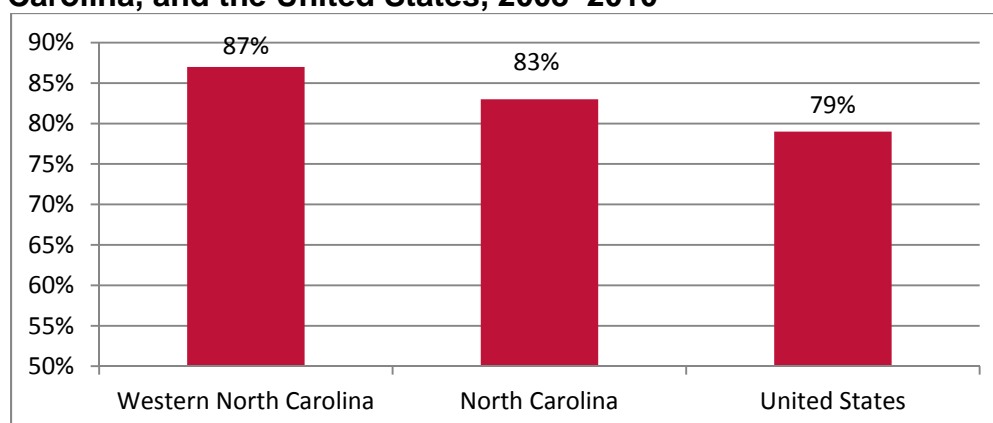
## The Status of Women in Western North Carolina

Women in Western North Carolina, as in North Carolina as a whole, have made much progress during the last few decades. The majority of women work—many in professional and managerial jobs—and women are a mainstay of the economic health of their communities. Yet, there are some ways in which women's status still lags behind men's, and not all women are prospering equally. This briefing paper provides basic information about the status of women in Western North Carolina—including Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties—focusing on women's earnings and workforce participation, level of education, poverty, access to child care, and health status. It also provides background demographic information about women in the region.

### Work and Earnings

Women are an important part of Western North Carolina's labor force, but they continue to face specific challenges in the workforce, including a persistent gender wage gap (Figure 1 and Table 1). In this part of the state, half of women aged 16 and older (51 percent) are in the workforce (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The proportion of women who are either employed or actively looking for work in this area is lower than in the state and the United States as a whole (both 59 percent), which is likely a reflection of Western North Carolina's higher-than-average share of older women in the population (Table 4). In Western North Carolina, as in North Carolina overall, the labor force participation rate for women is much lower than for men (Table 1).

**Figure 1. Ratio of Women's to Men's Earnings in Western North Carolina, North Carolina, and the United States, 2008–2010**



Note: For employed women and men aged 16 and older.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 and 2010 Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010). Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010 only.

In Western North Carolina, as in the state overall, the labor force participation rate for women with dependent children (under 18) is higher than for all women (Table 1). Seventy-two percent of mothers with dependent children in this area are in the workforce. Men with dependent children in Western North Carolina are much more likely (92 percent) than their female counterparts to be in the workforce (Table 1), suggesting that women are more likely than men to cut back on employment when they are parents.

The majority of employed women and men in Western North Carolina work full-time, but employed women are much more likely than employed men to work part-time (27 percent of employed women and 19 percent of employed men work part-time).<sup>ii</sup> The reasons for women's higher rates of part-time work vary. Some women work part-time because they cannot find child care or for other family-care related reasons; in North Carolina overall (data are not available for Western North Carolina), 20 percent of women, compared with only 3 percent of men, give these reasons for working part-time.<sup>iii</sup> In addition, although the Great Recession has led both men and women in recent years to experience an increase in part-time work for economic reasons, women are more likely to work in the sectors and occupations where jobs are only available on a part-time basis (Shaefer 2009). Part-time workers are less likely than full-time workers to have access to paid leave, health care, and employer-supported pensions (Society for Human Resource Management 2011).

In addition to these differences in hours worked, women and men in Western North Carolina, as in the nation as a whole, tend to work in different occupations. Thirty-seven percent of employed women in this area work in professional and managerial jobs, a higher proportion than employed men (22 percent; Table 1). Women are about as likely as men to hold management positions in Western North Carolina (8 percent of employed women hold these positions compared with 9 percent of employed men).<sup>iv</sup>

Women and men in Western North Carolina, as in the state and nation as a whole, often work in different occupations. Employed women are more likely than their male counterparts to work in office and administrative support occupations (22 percent compared with 6 percent), personal care and service occupations (6 percent compared with 2 percent), and education and health care practitioner occupations (20 percent compared with 5 percent). Employed men are more likely than employed women to work in transportation and material moving occupations (9 percent compared with 2 percent) and in installation, maintenance, and repair occupations.<sup>v</sup> Employed men are also three times as likely as employed women to work in production jobs (9 percent compared with 3 percent).<sup>vi</sup>

Although women in Western North Carolina hold a higher proportion of professional jobs than men and are about as likely to be in management positions, they have lower median earnings. In 2008–2010, the median annual earnings of women aged 16 and older employed full-time, year-round in the seven counties combined were \$30,000 compared with \$34,435 for men. This means that women earned 87 cents for every dollar earned by men, resulting in a gender wage gap of 13 percent. This gender wage gap is narrower than the gap in both North Carolina (17 percent) and the United States as a whole (21 percent).<sup>vii</sup> The reason for the smaller wage gap in Western North Carolina lies partly in the comparatively low earnings of men in the area. Although both women and men in Western North Carolina earn less than their counterparts in the state and nation as a whole, the difference is greater for men, resulting in a smaller gender wage gap in Western North Carolina (Table 1).

**Table 1. Overview of Women's and Men's Economic Status**

	Western North Carolina	North Carolina	United States
<b>Labor Force Participation Rate, Aged 16 and Older</b>			
Women	51%	59%	59%
Men	60%	70%	70%
Mothers with Children Under 18	72%	74%	73%
Fathers with Children Under 18	92%	94%	94%
<b>Percent of Employed Women and Men Who Work Full-Time, Aged 16 and Older</b>			
Women	73%	72%	71%
Men	81%	84%	84%
<b>Percent of Women and Men Employed in Professional or Managerial Occupations, Aged 16 and Older</b>			
Women	37%	40%	39%
Men	22%	30%	33%
<b>Median Annual Earnings, Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, Aged 16 and Older</b>			
Women	\$30,000	\$33,000	\$36,000
Men	\$34,435	\$40,000	\$45,500
<b>Gender Earnings Ratio, Aged 16 and Older</b>	87%	83%	79%
<b>Gender Earnings Ratio by Educational Attainment, Aged 25 and Older</b>			
Less Than High School Diploma	N/A	76%	74%
High School Diploma or Equivalent	79%	75%	74%
Some College or Associate's Degree	82%	76%	76%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	87%	70%	71%
<b>Proportion of Women and Men With a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, Aged 25 and Older</b>			
Women	21%	27%	28%
Men	22%	26%	29%
<b>Proportion of Women and Men With a High School Diploma or Less, Aged 25 and Older</b>			
Women	47%	40%	42%
Men	49%	46%	44%
<b>Percent of Women and Men Living At or Below Poverty, Aged 18 and Older</b>			
Women	17%	17%	15%
Men	14%	13%	12%
<b>Percent of All Households Receiving Food Stamps</b>	11%	13%	12%
<b>Percent of Women and Men Without Health Insurance Coverage, Aged 18–64</b>			
Women	27%	21%	19%
Men	30%	26%	25%

Note: Data for Western North Carolina are for 2008–2010. Median annual earnings are in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars.

Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010 only.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 and 2010 American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

## Educational Attainment



Slightly more than one-fifth of all women and men aged 25 and older in Western North Carolina have a bachelor's degree or higher (21 percent of women and 22 percent of men; Table 1). Women in these counties combined are considerably less likely than women in the state or the nation to have at least a bachelor's degree (27 percent for the state and 28 percent for the nation; Table 1).

Approximately 34,000 women aged 25 and older in Western North Carolina (47 percent; Table 1) have only a high school diploma or less.<sup>viii</sup> The proportion of women in Western North Carolina with this level of education is higher than the proportion of women in the state and nation but lower than the proportion of men in this area (Table 1). Women with a low level of educational attainment, however, are less likely than men to have jobs with wages sufficient to sustain a family. Median annual earnings for women in Western North Carolina who are employed full-time, year-round and have only a high school diploma or the equivalent are \$25,410, compared with \$32,000 for similarly-educated men.<sup>ix</sup> With some college education or an associate's degree, women earn \$30,000, which is less than the amount that men earn with only a high school diploma. Median annual earnings for men with some college education or an associate's degree in Western North Carolina are \$36,460.<sup>x</sup>

In Western North Carolina, as in the state and nation as a whole, having a college education substantially raises the level of earnings for both women and men. Women in Western North Carolina with a bachelor's degree or higher have median annual earnings of \$45,000, compared with \$52,000 for similarly-educated men,<sup>xi</sup> resulting in a gender earnings ratio of 87 percent for women and men with this level of educational attainment (Table 1). This earnings ratio is the same as the ratio for women and men of all educational levels combined. In the state overall, the pattern differs: the gender earnings ratio is larger when only women and men with a bachelor's degree or higher are compared (Table 1).

## Poverty

Many women in Western North Carolina live with incomes that are below or near the federal poverty line. Approximately 13,707 women aged 18 and older (17 percent) in this area are poor (living with incomes at or below the federal poverty line), and another 17,630 (22 percent) are *near* poverty (living with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the federal poverty line).<sup>xii</sup> In Western North Carolina, the poverty rates for women are the same as in the state but slightly higher than in the nation as a whole, where 15 percent of women are poor. Fourteen percent of men in the counties that comprise Western North Carolina live at or below the poverty line (13 percent; Table 1).

Poverty is a particularly serious problem for families headed by women with children. In Haywood and Macon counties (data are not available for the remaining counties in Western North Carolina), families headed by women with children under 18 are 25 percent and 22 percent of all families with children in this age range, respectively, but they are 54 and 46 percent of all families in poverty with children under 18 (Table 2). In North Carolina as a whole, 12 percent of women with young children under five and incomes below the qualifying poverty threshold receive welfare cash assistance.<sup>xiii</sup>

**Table 2. The Status of Children: Family Income, Poverty, and Child Care**

<b>Family Income</b>	<b>Cherokee</b>	<b>Clay</b>	<b>Graham</b>	<b>Haywood</b>	<b>Jackson</b>	<b>Macon</b>	<b>Swain</b>	<b>North Carolina</b>
Annual Income a Family of One Adult and Two Children Needs to Afford Essential Living Expenses, 2010 <sup>1</sup>	\$37,563	\$38,010	\$37,637	\$39,531	\$39,435	\$39,646	\$38,110	\$41,920
Median Annual Income of Married-Couple Families with Children Under 18 Years, 2008–2010	\$62,500	N/A	N/A	\$64,794	\$58,409	\$49,922	N/A	\$70,124
Median Annual Income of Single Men with Children Under 18 Years, 2008–2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$29,874
Median Annual Income of Single Women with Children Under 18 Years, 2008–2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$24,048	N/A	N/A	\$20,393
<b>Poverty</b>								
Number of All Families in Poverty, 2008–2010 with Children Under 18 <sup>2</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,413	N/A	990	N/A	254,650
Share of Families in Poverty with Children Under 18 that are Headed by Single Women, 2008–2010 <sup>2</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	54%	N/A	46%	N/A	61%
Share of Families with Children Under 18 that are Headed by Single Women, 2008–2010 <sup>2</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	25%	N/A	22%	N/A	29%
<b>Child Care</b>								
Children Eligible for Child Care Subsidy, SFY 2010–2011 <sup>3</sup>	1,106	509	339	2,374	1,584	1,325	748	391,549
Budget Currently Available to Serve Eligible Children, SFY 2010–2011 <sup>3</sup>	\$1,432,003	\$467,468	\$518,431	\$2,559,748	\$1,922,225	\$1,495,754	\$733,870	N/A
Percent of Eligible Children Receiving Subsidized Child Care Services, SFY 2010–2011 <sup>3</sup>	20%	21%	14%	24%	19%	25%	24%	N/A
Budget per Child Eligible for Child Care Subsidy, SFY 2010–2011	\$1,294.76	\$918.40	\$1,529.29	\$1078.24	\$1,213.53	\$1,128.87	\$981.11	N/A
Total Number of Children Aged 0 to 5 Enrolled in Child Care, 2011 <sup>4</sup>	818	280	187	1,645	649	817	793	207,953

Note: N/A indicates data are not available.

Sources: <sup>1</sup>Sirota and McLenaghan 2010; <sup>2</sup>IWPR analysis based on 2008–2010 American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder; <sup>3</sup>North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education 2012; <sup>4</sup>The Annie E. Casey Foundation Data Center Kids Count 2012.

## Child Care

Early care and education programs provide an important workforce support for mothers and fathers. Affordable, quality child care makes it possible for parents to do their jobs while knowing their children are receiving adequate support and a good education. In the absence of quality, affordable child care, women may decide to interrupt their tenure in the labor market, reducing their ability to provide for their families, put aside resources for retirement, or save for emergencies. Alternatively, they may have to put their children in low-quality and unreliable care.

In North Carolina, the average fees for year-round, full-time child care range from \$6,227 (for a four-year old in a family child care home) to \$9,185 (for an infant in a child care center; Child Care Aware of America 2012). By comparison, the average annual tuition and fees for a public four-year college in North Carolina are \$5,685 (Child Care Aware of America 2012). In Western North Carolina, a total of 7,985 children are eligible for child care subsidies because their parents earn too little to afford the fees. Yet, no more than one in four eligible children receives child care subsidies in any of Western North Carolina's seven counties (Table 2).

## Health

Health is an important component of women's and girls' overall well-being that contributes to their economic stability, educational attainment, and employment opportunities. While many women in Western North Carolina experience good health, health outcomes vary considerably by county in the region, suggesting that women's health care needs in this area remain an important part of their status that must be addressed and examined.

Having basic health insurance coverage is critical to women's access to health care. More than one in four women (27 percent) in Western North Carolina do not have health insurance coverage; the proportion of uninsured men is even higher (30 percent; Table 1). Lack of health insurance leaves women without coverage for basic wellness and check-up visits, let alone for medical care for severe or chronic medical problems.

In Cherokee, Haywood, Jackson, and Macon counties, the female mortality rate for breast cancer for women between 2005 and 2009 was higher (33.7, 26.8, 30.0, and 25.1 per 100,000, respectively) than for women in the state as a whole (23.5 per 100,000; Table 3). Data on breast cancer for women in Clay, Graham, and Swain counties for this time period are not available.

Women in all but one county in Western North Carolina have a higher mortality rate due to heart disease than women in the state of North Carolina overall; only in Jackson County do women have a lower mortality rate from heart disease than in the state as a whole (Table 3). In all counties in Western North Carolina for which data are available except Swain, women have a lower mortality rate from stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases than women in the state overall (Table 3).<sup>xii</sup>

Although teen pregnancy rates in the state and nation have fallen in recent years, teenage pregnancy remains a problem in many jurisdictions. In Swain County, the teenage pregnancy rate was higher (54.3 per 1,000) than for women in the state as a whole (49.7 per 1,000; Table 3). In Cherokee, Haywood, Jackson, and Macon counties, however, teen pregnancy rates were either lower than or approximately equal to the rate in the state overall (Table 3). Data on teenage pregnancy in 2010 for teens aged 15–19 in Clay and Graham counties are not available.



**Table 3. Overview of Women's Health Status**

	Cherokee	Clay	Graham	Haywood	Jackson	Macon	Swain	North Carolina	United States
<b>Total Number of Teen Pregnancies, Aged 15–19 Years, 2010<sup>1</sup></b>	37	10	17	68	61	46	25	15,957	N/A
<b>Pregnancy Rate Among Teens Aged 15–19 (per 1,000), 2010<sup>1</sup></b>	49.1	N/A	N/A	41.9	31.0	49.5	54.3	49.7	N/A
<b>Average Annual Mortality Rate for Breast Cancer, All Ages, 2005–2009<sup>2</sup></b>	33.7	N/A	N/A	26.8	30.0	25.1	N/A	23.5	23.0
<b>Heart Disease Mortality Rate, All Ages, 2005–2009<sup>3</sup></b>	180.1	171.0	188.1	161.1	143.2	168.5	208.1	153.6	161.0
<b>Mortality Rate from Stroke and Other Cerebrovascular Diseases, All Ages, 2005–2009<sup>3</sup></b>	48.0	46.7	N/A	47.5	29.8	38.6	65.9	50.4	42.7
<b>Diabetes Mortality Rate, All Ages, 2005–2009<sup>3</sup></b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	13.0	19.2	16.5	N/A	20.8	19.8

Notes: N/A indicates data are not available.

All mortality rates are per 100,000 and age-adjusted to the total U.S. population in 2000.

Sources: <sup>1</sup> North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services 2012.

<sup>2</sup> National Cancer Institute State Cancer Profiles 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2012.

## Basic Facts About Women in Western North Carolina

The female population in Western North Carolina is much less racially and ethnically diverse than in the state as a whole. Approximately nine in ten women and girls (89 percent) in these counties combined are white, compared with about two-thirds (65 percent) in the state overall. In Western North Carolina, American Indian women and girls constitute the next largest race and ethnic group within the female population at five percent, which is five times their share of the state's total American Indian female population (Table 4). Four percent of women and girls in the seven counties combined are foreign-born, compared with seven percent in the state as a whole (Table 4).

The median age for all women and girls in Western North Carolina is 46 years, eight years older than the median age for women and girls in the state and the United States as a whole. Twenty-two percent of women in Western North Carolina are aged 65 and older, compared with 15 percent in North Carolina and the nation overall (Table 4).

**Table 4. Basic Demographic Statistics for Women and Girls**

	<b>Western North Carolina</b>	<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>United States</b>
<b>Total Population</b>	193,156	9,561,558	309,349,689
Number of Women and Girls, All Ages	98,679	4,905,216	157,294,247
Median Age of All Women and Girls	46	38	38
Proportion of Women Aged 65 and Older	22%	15%	15%
<b>Distribution of Women and Girls by Race and Ethnicity, All Ages</b>			
White, Not Hispanic	89%	65%	64%
Black, Not Hispanic	N/A	22%	13%
Hispanic	3%	8%	16%
Asian American, Not Hispanic	1%	2%	5%
American Indian, Not Hispanic	5%	1%	1%
Other, Not Hispanic	1%	2%	2%
<b>Proportion of Women and Girls Who Are Foreign-Born, All Ages</b>	4%	7%	13%
<b>Proportion of Women Who Are Married, Aged 18 and Older</b>	56%	50%	49%

Notes: Data for Western North Carolina are for 2008–2010. Data for North Carolina and the United States are for 2010 only. N/A indicates data are not available due to small sample size.

Those whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic may be of any race. “Other” includes those reporting multiple race identities and those whom the Census Bureau did not classify.

Totals may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 and 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

## Conclusion

Many women in Western North Carolina are thriving, yet areas for further improvements remain, including the gender wage gap, the lack of affordable child care, and limited access to basic health insurance. Policy recommendations to address these challenges include

- working with employers to ensure equality for women in recruitment, promotion, and earnings;
- monitoring workforce development to ensure that women and men have equal access to training in high-growth, well-paid careers;
- offering career counseling and financial supports for women with low levels of education;
- increasing allocations for child care subsidies;
- supporting targeted teen pregnancy prevention programs and increased support for teens who are already pregnant and parenting; and
- ensuring that all families who need it receive “Work First” assistance, North Carolina’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program.



## Methodological Notes

This briefing paper presents data for Western North Carolina, defined to include Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties. Demographic and economic data are based on IWPR analysis of the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series version of the American Community Survey (Ruggles et al. 2010) and on American Community Survey data accessed through American Fact Finder. IWPR used estimates that combine several years of data (2008–2010) for Western North Carolina to ensure sufficient sample sizes. Data for the state and nation as a whole are based on one-year (2010) data. Data on child care come from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Child Care Aware of America, and the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education. Data on women’s health status are from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Cancer Institute, and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services; for some indicators, data are not be available for all counties because the number of sample cases is too small. To define Western North Carolina, IWPR aggregated Public Use Microdata Area variables (PUMAs), which are the smallest geographical unit available in the American Community Survey data.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Western North Carolina is defined to include Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties.

<sup>ii</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>iii</sup> IWPR calculations based on U.S. Department of Labor (2011) "Table 23: States: Persons at Work 1 to 34 Hours by Sex, Age, Race, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and Hours of Work, 2010 Annual Averages."

<sup>iv</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>v</sup> Seven percent of employed men work in these occupations; the sample size for women is too small to provide an estimate.

<sup>vi</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>vii</sup> Because these estimates are based on the American Community Survey, they are not strictly comparable to IWPR's standard calculation of the gender wage gap for the United States, which is based on the Current Population Survey (CPS). In 2010, the national earnings gap based on the CPS was 23 percent (Hegewisch and Williams 2011).

<sup>viii</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>ix</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

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<sup>xi</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>xii</sup> IWPR analysis of 2008–2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>xiii</sup> IWPR analysis based on 2010 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

<sup>xi</sup> Heart disease is defined as acute and chronic rheumatic fever and heart disease, hypertensive heart and renal disease, ischaemic heart disease, pulmonary heart disease and diseases of pulmonary circulation, and other forms of heart disease. Cerebrovascular disease is defined as cerebral haemorrhages, cerebral infraction, stroke, and other cerebrovascular disease. Diabetes is defined as diabetes mellitus.

This briefing paper was prepared by Ariane Hegewisch, Rhiana Gunn-Wright, and Claudia Williams with support from the N.C. Council for Women, Wells Fargo, Women for Women of the Community

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Foundation of Western North Carolina, the Mountain Area Health Education Center Department of OB-GYN, and the North Carolina Women's Fund at the North Carolina Community Foundation.

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